

James Madison to George Washington, January 25, 1788. Transcription: The Writings of James Madison, ed. Gaillard Hunt. New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1900-1910.

TO GEORGE WASHINGTON. WASH. MSS.

N York, Jany. 25, 1788.

Dear Sir, —

I have been favored since my last with yours of the 10th inst,¹ with a copy of the Governors letter to the Assembly. I do not know what impression the letter may make in Virginia. It is generally understood here that the arguments contained in it in favor of the Constitution are much stronger than the objections which prevented his assent. His arguments are forcible in all places, and with all persons. His objections are connected with his particular way of thinking on the subject, in which many of the adversaries to the Constitution do not concur.²

¹ The letter related to the state of public opinion in Virginia. "That the opposition should have gained strength at Richmond," it said, "among the members of Assembly, is not, if true, to be wondered at, when we consider that the great adversaries to the Constitution are all assembled at that place, acting conjointly, with the promulgated sentiments of Colonel Richard Henry Lee as auxiliary."— *Writings* (Ford), xi., 207.

² December 27, 1787, Edmund Randolph wrote that the current was against the Constitution; that Gen. Wilkinson was violently opposed to it.— *Chic. Hist. Soc. MSS.*

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Henry Lee wrote on his way home from Richmond, Dec.— 1787: “Three sets of men are to be found on the question of government. One opposed to any system, was it even sent from heaven which tends to confirm the union of the States—Henry is the leader of this band— Another who would accept the new Constitution from conviction of its excellence, or any federal system, sooner than [?] the dissolution of the confederacy, & a third who dislike the proposed government, wish it amended, but if this is not practicable, would adopt it sooner than jeopardize the Union—Mason may be considered as the head of this set—

“From such a discordance in opinion, I believe if the friends to the govt. in the State Convention should manage wisely, & if nine States should have ratified it before Virga. assembles that we may count on the dominion as an accepting State. Your county is divided like many others in their sentiments—Barber & Burnley are warmly opposed & may consider it their duty to prevent your election. . . . If you think you may fail in Orange several countys in Kentucky would on application by let. elect you.”

Archibald Stuart wrote from Richmond, January 14:

“The anti-constitutional Fever which raged here some time ago begins to abate & I am not without hopes that many patients will be restored to their senses—Mr. Page of Rosewell has become a convert. Gen. Nelson begins to view the Govt with a more favorable eye & I am told St. G: Tucker has confessed his sins.

“Publius is in general estimation, his greatness is acknowledged universally—Colo. Carrington has sent me his numbers as low down as ye. 24th. inclusive which Dixon has been printing for some time past & should he leave New York I must rely upon yourself & Mr. Brown to transmit the remainder of them as they shall appear—They may be directed to me or in my absence to Mr. John Dixon— . . .

“Pray let nothing divert you from coming to ye. Convention—rdquo;

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Edward Carrington wrote from Richmond, January 18:

“The leaders of the opposition appear generally to be preparing for a decent submission—the language amongst them is, that amendments must be tried if there should, at the sitting of the convention, be a prospect of carrying them down in a respectable number of States, but that should this appear improbable, the constitution must be adopted—I have seen but few of these Gentlemen but have good information as to most of their dispositions upon the subject. The Governour's letter to the Public, which you doubtless have before this seen, marks out this conduct, and I think that publication will be of great service. Mr. Henry, it is said, is determined to amend & leave the fate of the measure to depend on all the other States conforming to the Will of Virginia. His language is, that the other States cannot do without us, and therefore we can dictate to them what terms we please—should they be weak enough to stand out, we may alone enter into foreign alliances—the value of our staple is such that any nation will be ready to treat with us separately—I have not heard of any who have shewn a disposition to go this length with him, except Mr. Bullet whom I saw at Dumfries, and I think at the day of trial but few will be found so mad.

“Mr. B. Randolph whose apprehensions from the Gigantic features in the constitution, appear to be as high as any whatever, is of opinion with the Governor—He thinks that should nine states have adopted when the Convention of Virginia meets, every idea of amendment ought to be abandoned, but that should there be a less number the attempt must be made, but with such caution as not to hazard entirely the rate of the measure. I am persuaded that this will become the prevailing sentiment amongst the malcontents, and in that case there will be tolerable safety, because I see no prospect of more than Rhode Isl^d. N. York & North Carolina holding out—the latter, it is said, & I believe with truth, have, out of respect for Virginia, deferred her convention until after the time appointed for ours to sit.”— *Mad. MSS.*

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The information from Boston by the mail on the evening before last, has not removed out suspense. The following is an extract of a letter from Mr. King, dated on the 16th inst.¹

¹ The original of the letter is among the Madison MSS. Madison has given the whole of it here with perfect accuracy.

When King left New York he wrote to Madison Jany. 6, 1788, asking him to furnish him with information to use in the Massachusetts Convention.— *Mad. MSS.*

“We may have 360 members in our Convention. Not more than 330 have yet taken their seats. Immediately after the settlement of Elections, the Convention resolved that they would consider and freely debate on each paragraph without taking a question on any of them individually, & that on the question whether they would ratify, each member should be at liberty to discuss the plan at large. This Resolution seems to preclude the idea of amendments; and hitherto the measure has not been suggested. I however do not from this circumstance conclude that it may not hereafter occur. The opponents of the Constitution moved that Mr. Gerry should be requested to take a seat

in the Convention to answer such enquiries as the Convention should make concerning facts which happened in the *passing of the Constitution*. Although this seems to be a very irregular proposal, yet considering the jealousies which prevail with those who made it, (who are certainly not the most enlightened part of the Convention,) and the doubt of the issue had it been made a trial of strength, several friends of the Constitution united with the opponents and the resolution was agreed to and Mr. Gerry has taken his seat. Tomorrow we are told certain enquiries are to be moved for by the opposition, and that Mr. Gerry under the idea of stating facts is to state his reasons, &c.—this will be opposed and we shall on the division be able to form some idea of our relative strength. From the men who are in favour of the Constitution every reasonable explanation will be given, and arguments really new and in my judgment most excellent have been and will be produced in its support. But what will be its fate, I confess I am unable to discern. No question ever

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classed the people of this State in a more extraordinary manner, or with more apparent firmness.”

A Congress of seven States was made up on monday. Mr. C. Griffin has been placed in the chair. This is the only step yet taken.

I remain, with the highest respect & Attachmt., Yrs. Affecty.